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VICTORY TURNED INTO MOURNING.

A DISCOURSE,

ON OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

LATE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

PREACHED AT CASTINE,

BY

ALFRED E. IVES.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

BANGOR:
WHEELER & LYNDE, PRINTERS.
1865.

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2 Samuel, xix. 2 :—"*The victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people.*"

A most unnatural rebellion against king David had just been suppressed by one sharp, decisive battle, and by the ignominious death of the rebel leader. David was an affectionate father as well as a sovereign; and though he had been compelled to take hasty flight from his capital, to save his life, finding no place of safety short of the eastern bank of the Jordan,—the whole kingdom, aside from this, being swept over by the sudden wave of the rebellion,—yet now, when the crisis was past, and the victory had given him security for his life and his throne, his thoughts became absorbed in the tragic fate of his son,—that indulged and favored but ambitious son, who had so wickedly plotted against the throne and the very life of his father, and had just been slain in the midst of his wickedness. Forgetting all other interests, the feelings of the father overcame the man and the sovereign, and he gave himself up to the agony of the moment.

The army, which had remained faithful to the king, and had suffered, and fought, and bled, and conquered, leaving not a few of their number dead upon the field, flushed with the great victory, returned, expecting the thanks and congratulations of a grateful sovereign, so narrowly escaped from utter destruction. There was a strong and painful revulsion of feeling as they found king David mourning for Absalom; no thought for them, their labors and sufferings; no

thought for the welfare of the nation ; given up to tenderness and grief at the just fate of the rebel, who deserved thousand a deaths. There was a time for pity, a time for compassion, a time to weep and lament; but such feelings and expressions at this time, in these circumstances, such a reception, were too much for the people ; and the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people; and they got them away by stealth into the city, as people ashamed steal away from the battle.

This was David's weakness, though there was much to excuse that weakness. Then, higher interests than the promptings of his own compassion,—the interests of a great kingdom,—the interests of all good government everywhere, should have been controlling. Let him weep, if he must,—this is not forbidden ;—but let him hold aloft, all the while, a keen and glittering sword.

And Joab came into the house unto the king and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines; in that thou lovest thine enemies and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day that thou regardest neither princes nor servants; for this day I perceive that if Absalom had lived and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well.

It was a bold but deserved reproof; for while clemency toward the mass of misguided men, who had been lured away, was proper, yet sorrow and regret for the death of the arch rebel was unkindness and unfaithfulness to his devoted servants,—was dishonorable to the true and heroic men just slain in his behalf on the battle-field.

Our circumstances have points of strong resemblance to these, and points of striking difference. In each case, it is rebellion against righteous government. Then, it was simple ambition ; now, it is that and much more : back of that ambition, the platform on which that rebellion rested, was a system of crying wickedness, seeking perpetuation, and extension, and domination, through rebellion. There, rebellion was sudden, sweeping like a flash—like fire through the prairie grass with a strong wind, from Dan to Beersheba. Here, it is the result of long and deep plotting, though sudden in its outbreak and confined to its legitimate territory. There, the guilty head of the rebellion was slain. Here, many less culpable, and many inno-

cent, but pressed into the rebel ranks, have fallen; but the arch-traitors, the villainous conspirators, the diabolical authors of the rebellion, are not hanging, like Absalom, between the earth and the heaven; they still live, without even the signs of penitence. There, rebellion met a disastrous overthrow, its army at once routed and scattered. Not so quickly, by a single battle, but more thoroughly, has the rebellion here also been crushed, its resources utterly exhausted.

But the point of striking contrast is in that which turns our victory into weeping. At the last, after a long and desperate struggle, the final blow had beaten down and scattered the most formidable armies of the rebellion. The rebel capital, and the commander-in-chief of all the rebel armies, were in our hands. The members of the rebel government were fugitives. We were rejoicing in the victory. Every heart was full and overflowing. Salutes, illuminations, bonfires, and waving flags, were everywhere. The oppressive weight which had borne on the hearts of all the loyal people for four weary years of wasting and blood, was lifted. There was relief. There was success. There was glorious victory.

In the midst of this rejoicing, the sad tidings were borne to us yesterday, and over all the land, that the President of the United States was no more; that he had fallen by the hand of an assassin. In the midst of his usefulness, in his high position, the pivot on which the great interests of the nation were turning, the man on whom, more than any other at this time, the eyes of the world were looking—he was murderously shot.

In the town of Delft, in the Netherlands, on Tuesday, July 10, 1584, at two o'clock in the afternoon, the celebrated William, Prince of Orange, rose from his table after dinner, and passing into the vestibule, was just beginning to mount the staircase to his private apartment, when a man emerged from a recess, and standing within a foot or two of the Prince, discharged a pistol full at his heart. Three poisoned balls entered his body. The Prince exclaimed, "O my God, have mercy on my soul; O my God, have mercy on this poor people," and in a few minutes breathed his last in the arms of his wife and sister.*

To this Prince, often called William the Silent, the Dutch Repub-

*Motley, Dutch Republic.

lic, as an emancipated commonwealth, owned its existence. His courage and skill, in military and political combinations, overcame the most powerful and unscrupulous monarch of his age, the base and depraved Philip the Second, of Spain. That long and desperate struggle forms one of the most important epochs in history, a history not foreign to us, since "the revolutions in Holland, England and America are all links of one chain," "a single chapter in the great volume of human fate," progressive steps in the advancement of freedom.

William was a man of peculiar integrity and uprightness, a religious man, in the darkest hours relying implicity on the wisdom and goodness of God; serene in danger, unshaken in constancy; a soldier, a statesman; not only the head of the State, but enthroned in the affections of his people.

What Phillip could not effect by arms nor by diplomacy, he attempted by villainy, setting a price on the head of the foremost man of the age; offering 25,000 crowns and large additional advantages, to any assassin who would take the life of the Prince of Orange.

Successive attempts were made at his life; the plottings were many, but without effect, till he fell by the vile hand of Gerard.

Great as was the loss of the country, great as was the work remaining for him to do, in consolidating the States into one great and free Commonwealth, yet his life and labors established the Dutch Republic.

We have to look far and wide in human history to find a parallel where so much personal worth, and a life so useful and so necessary to his country, in one filling the highest office in the State, is so basely taken by the hand of villainy, at the instigation of his enemies.

In this country, during the last four years, we have seen events transpire, among the most remarkable in the history of the world; taking into account the age, the country, the aim, the manner, the magnitude of the events, more striking probably than any thing in the past, in the form of rebellion, revolution and war. The depths of human wickedness had been sounded, and we supposed the bottom had been touched, already, in the progress of this rebellion, but a lower deep has been found.

The President of the United States, called to that high office by the suffrages of a free people, is shot down and murdered by a vile assassin. And this is done, not when his death can have any material effect on the success or failure of the rebellion. Months ago possibly it might have been otherwise. Now the rebellion is crushed and cannot be resuscitated. It is dead except, it may be, the spasm of a final gasp.

And it is not the President alone, but the same murderous aim seeks the life of the distinguished Secretary of State, whose skilful and wise diplomacy has carried us clear from the interferance of foreign nations; and who is among the few of our public men who deserve the name of Statesmen. As if no element of meanness were to be wanting in the base assassination, he is assailed by the dagger when reclining, a weakened invalid, upon his couch—the murderous hand inflicting fearful wounds upon all in attendance.

Is there a lower deep than this in the depravity of man? Has this vile rebellion still another odious feature? Can it show itself more devilish? Perhaps this last drama was necesssary to break the last link that could bind any decent mind in sympathy with the rebellion; and to fill full the cup of humiliation of those governments and peoples of the old world, whose hearts and hands have been with these wicked men.

Abraham Lincoln will live in the hearts of the men of this generation while they live! Abraham Lincoln is a name that will grow brighter as the years roll on! If he had defects, they will be all forgotten, and only his virtues, his more than Roman virtues, will live, esteemed more highly as, in the distance, they are seen more truly. Among four millions of our population, and that number ere long to be ten and twenty millions, he will be canonized; more and more, as the years pass, he will rise before them, in gigantic proportions, as a very demigod, or as God's chosen Angel of Deliverance!

He had stood at the helm, and, through the terrible storm, cautiously, calmly, successfully, had guided the ship of state. All inexperienced before, in the new and terrible trials to which we were called, he had proved the man for the occasion. His strong and plain practical sense, and his instinctive sagacity; his deliberate but safe judgment, and his teachable watching for the providence of

God; his unshaken confidence in the right, committing to that right himself and his precious charge; his incorruptible integrity; his rare simplicity; his high morality; his humble fear of God; these combined to form a character and a man, homely indeed, but strong and true; never pretentious, never sparkling, but practical, wise, reliable—as if a sort of infallible instinct had guided him where reason could not feel assured, where statesmanship was at a loss—a strange man in these artificial days—raised up by God and especially schooled for this emergency. God's appointed leader, he conducted us, like Moses, through the wilderness to the borders of the promised land; as Moses, from Nebo looked over that promised inheritance, so he, from Richmond, saw the certainty and the nearness of the blessed consummation; and when we were looking that he should himself lead us over Jordan, and himself see us settled safely and securely in that new and better order which he had inaugurated, suddenly we are shocked with the astounding intelligence that he is taken from us. Had there been some premonition, some sickness, something that should have said to us; "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy Master from thy head to-day?"—while the bereavement would have been equal, the shock would have been less. Had it been immediately by the hand of God, and not by the hand of villany, the trial to our feelings would have been less. Had he been a different man,—not less sagacious, and wise, and successful, but with less of the milk of human kindness; with a heart less warm and less large; with less of those qualities which made so proper the familiar and hardly respectful appellation, "Father Abraham;" had his administration, in what was personal to himself, been less paternal and more austere; had he been less familiar and more reserved and distant—standing more on his dignity, and less childlike—more ready to say "No," and less kindly indulgent,—then we could bear our affliction better. But now it makes its appeal to the heart, so that, among all the people, the shout and the joy of victory are immediately turned to mourning. There was something in the simplicity of his manners, though awkward,—in the simplicity of his words and style, that knew nothing of the schools,—in the simplicity of his heart, too large and too honest to cherish secretion or indulge in selfishness, that appealed to the confidence and the affection of others.

In the time of our bereavement, when our hearts are tender and

sad, we are prone to overlook and forget the imperfections of the departed whom we love, remembering while we magnify only their worthiness. Doubtless we are liable to do so now. But striving to lay aside all partiality, I think it cannot be otherwise than that impartial history will reckon him as a man especially raised up and especially qualified for a work greater and more important than often falls to the lot of great men: and that the verdict will be, that he performed that duty with rare fidelity and rare ability: that when the life of the nation was imperilled, and when in that national life were bound up the hopes and the prospects of free governments throughout the world—the cause of the people as opposed to the governments of oppression; when human slavery was to be the corner stone of a new government, and was to be perpetuated and extended over unlimited territory,—or that system of oppression and the projects of that new government, reared on the ruins of the Great Republic, were to be suppressed and crushed, and four millions of bondmen were to be led forth to freedom,—that he, as God's instrument, set them free, and thwarted the unholy plot, stamping rebellion under foot, and preserved the best government the world has ever known. The nation lives! This free government survives the terrible ordeal! The rebellion has been broken and stamped as the small dust! The combination of treachery and treason, of rebellion and murder, struggling with desperation in the death grapple, has been overcome! The system of slavery, hanging like a vampire on the nation's life, holding in bondage four millions of human beings, has been annihilated! True Democracy,—true and not spurious and disloyal—and New England principles, prevail over a hateful and corrupt oligarchy! These are the mighty results of the four years' struggle—these years of suffering and blood; and these results will be more justly appreciated in the future. And the guiding hand during these eventful years has finished its work. The head and the heart on which we have so much depended, and to which we are so much indebted, are ours no more. Abraham Lincoln is dead!

Perhaps it was fitting that it should be so. God, who has heretofore frustrated the plottings against the life of the President, may have now ceased to interpose his restraints, because thereby he could subserve his ends, and make the wrath of man to praise him.

If the personal fame of the President had been the object, he had now risen to the full height of his glory. His sun stood at mid

heaven. We cannot suppose it possible that in the complications necessarily involved in the many difficult questions yet to be settled, as the consequence of this rebellion, that any human wisdom will fail sometimes to mistake. Had he been spared, his reputation would have been more likely, in some measure, to decline than to increase. Now his glory is untarnished. And throughout the land, among all classes, and in coming years, and over all the world, and ever in history, his sudden and tragic death, and the blackness of that malignity which countenanced, and sympathized with, and encouraged, and plotted, and executed the hellish deed, will make more striking and more bright, the name and the fame of the illustrious dead.

But we cannot doubt, that in permitting this evil, there were ends of wisdom and goodness in the great plan of Him whose purposes embrace and use, as means or as occasions, both the benevolence and the malignity of man. We may believe that among the designs of God, in permitting this awful tragedy, was the purpose to teach us that our dependence for wisdom must not be on man. Hitherto it has been strikingly manifest that God has directed our affairs through the war. Mr. Lincoln acknowledged that he had not controlled circumstances, but that circumstances had controlled him. But circumstances are the finger and handwriting of God. —In the process of settlement and reconstruction now before us, caution and wisdom are needful, fully equal to the necessity of that period when the foundations of the government were laid. Not improbably we had been too confident that the sagacity and wisdom, so manifest in conducting our affairs during the past four years, would be equal to the coming emergencies. We are now cut off from that confidence. Our thoughts and our hopes naturally turn upward. It is a strength and wisdom not human but divine that we need.

We were in the midst of our exultation. The military power of the South—a power whose mad onset few governments could have resisted, and whose energetic and desperate persistance few, probably none other, could have endured—had been shivered and broken in pieces. The rebellion, whose frightful Gorgon head had been a thing of terror for four eventful years, was crushed. The rebel capital, so confident in its position and its military defenses, was in our hands. Our government, which had never before been severely tested, had shown its ability to live in the wildest sea, and to weather the most terrible of storms, coming out with her timbers staunch.

We had shown to the world, what had never before been known, the strength and capabilities of a free government. We were congratulating ourselves that the war, of such gigantic magnitude, had found our resources ample; that we were emerging, by no means exhausted,—the population not diminished but actually increased during these four years,—our property and resources apparently not less than before; even the debt, while standing against us as a government, yet in large part not against us as a people, since the notes of the government are due at home rather than abroad. We also felt the relief and the satisfaction of knowing that now every man's bands were loosed,—the cry of the enslaved no more rising against us to heaven—that the justice of God was no longer arrayed against us for the continuance of oppression.—The heavy weight removed, the causes of rejoicing so many and so great, the elastic heart of the people, long held down, sprung forth, jubilant, exultant! And while personal sorrow was in many hearts, and personal bereavement weighed down many a household, yet many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people; for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

In these circumstances, while justified in suitable expressions of joy, perhaps we were not enough mindful of the many and serious difficulties still before us,—different in their nature indeed, but serious in magnitude. The Union, so far broken up by this rebellion, is to be reconstructed: are our wisest and most sagacious statesmen confident and agreed as to the best method and the right method? There are conflicting elements in the constitution of Southern society, now thrown out of their former places, or in the process of being so; the aristocracy, the poor whites and the blacks, are not now, relatively, where they were before; their relative status in the future cannot be the same as in past time: but changes in things so radical are very serious. Then the blacks themselves—four millions, before slaves, now free—no thoughtful man can fail to see and feel that a problem is before us, in this population, not easy to be solved. And what shall be done with the rebels themselves? Excessive clemency and weakness may be ready to answer. Excessive severity may be equally prompt in her decisions, and equally prompt to execute them, if hemp enough can be found in the land. And when this is all over, there still remains, as a cause of solicitude, the feeling in the South

which this war has engendered, and which will not immediately and wholly die. Although the two cases in many important respects are unlike, we may remember that the rebellion of Absalom and the division of the kingdom under Rehoboam are not very remote from each other.

Perhaps our rejoicings were not enough with our afflictions in view. What a loss of human life! If we take no account of those who have fallen fighting for a wicked cause—once a part of our strength and no less a loss because dying as rebels—how many of our young men have died that the nation might be free! How many, of the noblest and the best—how many, who were the joy and the pride and the hope of their generation—dying on the field of battle, killed outright, or after hours or days of suffering, on the field or in the hospital; dying from hardships or privation or disease; dying from starvation, or murdered in Southern prisons, with barbarities and horrors which nothing but slavery has ever engendered! How many still live, disabled, enfeebled, maimed! How many households, how many hearts, carry a load of sorrow which will continue while they live—parents, widows, orphans!

Above the great sepulchre of this rebellion, where sleep the honored dead, sacrificed for their country's salvation, the name of Abraham Lincoln, and the name of the humblest soldier who has fallen, are engraved on the same immortal tablet!

Perhaps our rejoicings were not enough with trembling. We seemed warranted in the feeling of assurance that the adverse gale which has blown so violently and long, had expended its strength, and that coming prosperity was nigh and sure. But how a single bullet can change the prospects and condition of a great nation!—How in a moment, may a thing, slight in itself, prove disastrous to dearest interests!

Perhaps we were beginning to feel less our dependence on God.—We had been made at times, during the fearful strife, to feel and acknowledge that our help was in an Almighty arm. If now the feeling was waking within us that our arm had gotten us the victory, we have been taught that an arm of flesh is weak, and may fail us in an hour.

It is a great truth, to be ever in mind, that in his various dealings with us, in the blessings he confers, and in the evils which he per-

mits, it is not our material prosperity at which God aims—not so much to make us wealthy and populous and powerful—or it is these only as they may advance a further end, or only as they are the legitimate consequences of that which is more valuable. He would make us a better people. He would correct what is wrong and make us right. He would impart to us better principles. He would elevate and ennoble our aims. He would deepen and quicken within us the tone of a better life. The discipline of our afflictions is valuable in his sight so far, and only so far, as it is healthy, moral discipline—only so far as it makes us better. As we have looked at this great conflict, and as God has looked at it—as we have planned and labored and battled, and as God has acted for us, or has withholden his hand—we each have not always had the same specific end in view, and therefore the particular results, from time to time, have not always been what we desired. What we were to become as individuals, and as a nation, morally—as doing right and committed to the right—as honoring God and walking in his fear—the influence we were preparing to exert upon the world, and the nature even more than the amount of that influence—our preparation to act in carrying out God's purposes in raising and saving a fallen and ruined world—this is the end of God; for this he is schooling us; for this he is seeking to prepare us. He would free us from crying injustice, and from corruption, and from the evils of effeminacy, and make us manly, and pure, and upright, and strong, in preparation for that restored and glorious kingdom of which Jesus Christ is the Head!

Are we forbidden in earthly interests to find analogies to things spiritual and heavenly? In reclaiming the world from its rebellion, and gaining back and restoring the kingdom of God, how everything is cemented and sealed with blood! Even the world's Redeemer is made a bloody sacrifice. And our earthly interests, in this, are after the pattern of the heavenly, in that our great National Edifice, in its purification and reconstruction, is cemented with blood; while our noblest Victim has met a bloody death.

But will the great issue with rebellion be affected by this assassination? Not at all. It will be only that more iron will enter into the nerve of every soldier, and new keenness into the edge of his sword. It will be, to the leaders of the rebellion, that Justice will yield less readily to the intercession of Mercy. It will be that a lower humiliation will be awarded to the pride of the South.

What will be its effect on the government? Ours is a government of the people; are they less able to govern themselves? The Administration only carries out the people's will. Possibly there may be some modification of policy on some certain points, as the result; perhaps some slight embarrassment. It is not one mind but many minds that are to shape the policy of the future. He who received the prompting of those minds, and acted out their convictions, is gone, but they remain.

In God's spiritual kingdom the blood of martyrs has been the seed of the church. The cause of righteous and legitimate government, the cause of human freedom, have a martyr—a most distinguished martyr! That blood will hallow and strengthen the government. That blood will hallow the cause of Freedom; and in all ages and in all lands will make human bondage execrable. Slavery and rebellion, slavery and murder—they are different features of the same face—different parts of the same thing.

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